

Chicago-Style Italian Sausage

By J. Kenji López-Alt

Total Time 10 minutes

Rating ★★★★★ (85)

Chicago-style Italian sausage is a true regional specialty, but thankfully it's simple to make at home. This version, meant for topping a [Chicago thin-crust pizza](#), uses whole fennel seeds toasted in a skillet, then roughly cracked with a mortar and pestle — a spice grinder, food processor, blender or the bottom of a heavy pan will work. It gets mixed into fatty ground pork seasoned with salt, black pepper, fresh and granulated garlic, a bit of dried herbs, and a pinch of red pepper flakes. The key is to knead the mixture (whether by hand or in a stand mixture fitted with a paddle) until the proteins begin to unravel and cross-link, giving it a tacky texture that turns springy and juicy as the sausage cooks, releasing its flavorful fat to mingle with the sauce and cheese as the pizza bakes.

This recipe is part of our complete recipe for a [Chicago thin-crust pizza](#). View the recipe for the [finished pizza](#), as well as recipes for the [dough](#) and [accompanying sauce](#).

INGREDIENTS

Yield: 1 pound

- 1 tablespoon whole dried fennel seeds
- 1 pound ground pork shoulder
- 4 medium garlic cloves, finely minced
- 7 grams salt (about 2 teaspoons Diamond Crystal kosher salt, 1½ teaspoons Morton's coarse kosher salt or 1 teaspoon table salt)
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried marjoram
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- Large pinch of red-pepper flakes

PREPARATION

Step 1

Prepare the sausage: Heat the fennel seeds in a dry skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently, until lightly toasted and very aromatic. Transfer to a mortar and pestle or spice grinder and lightly crush.

Step 2

Combine the pork, fresh garlic, salt, garlic powder, oregano, marjoram, black pepper, pepper flakes, and toasted fennel in a large bowl. Knead aggressively with your hands until the mixture turns tacky and leaves a film behind on the bowl, a couple of minutes. (Alternatively, make the sausage in a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Knead the mixture at low speed until it forms a film on the inside of the bowl as instructed in Step 2.) Transfer to a sealed container and store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week until ready to use. You will have enough for 2 pizzas.

Private Notes

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